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What is wrong with the CIA's Robert M. Gates?

by Criton Zoakos

On Feb. 24, 1986, the deputy director of the CIA, John McMahon, resigned secretly, at approximately the same time as the President of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos, was almost forcibly being placed in an American aircraft en route to Guam. The man who replaced McMahon, Robert M. Gates, was, prior to these events, at the private residence of Secretary of State George F. Shultz, taking care of the final details of the toppling of Marcos, together with John Poindexter, chief of the NSC, Michael Armacost, Richard Armitage, Paul Wolfowitz and Philip Habib. The news was made public one full week after the event. No explanation was given, nor is the promotion of Gates necessarily connected with the "preemptive destabilization" of the Philippines.

The promotion of the 42-year-old Mr. Gates is yet another calamity for the intelligence effort of the United States: Mr. Gates, through his past contributions, has been intimately associated with one of the great disasters of American intelligence, the infamous "crumbling Soviet Empire" thesis, now dominant in government thinking. This thesis, which downplays the Soviet threat to the West on grounds that the "rotten" Soviet economy is collapsing from within and that ethnic and religious revolts are about to topple Soviet power, began gaining currency during 1982, the year in which CIA Director William Casey made Robert Gates deputy director for intelligence at the CIA, and chairman of the National Intelligence Council, which produces the National Intelligence Estimates of the United States Government. That was also the year in which the experienced Prof. Richard Pipes was unceremoniously kicked out of the National Security Council, to be replaced, first by 30-year-old "Russian expert" John Lenczowski, and, later, by Carter-era diplomat Jack F. Matlock.

Under the direction of Robert Gates, who, in his professional circle, is reputed to be the CIA's "best" Soviet analyst, the CIA, in 1983, produced a report on the Soviet economy, stating that mismanagement, corruption, and inefficiency had all but doomed the Soviet system to an untimely death. One year later, in 1984, Gates himself, testifying before Congress, further elaborated that the "crumbling Soviet Empire," suffers from "a perverse system of incentives [which] promotes inefficient behavior by enterprise managers and dampens the introduction of new technology into the economy."

The implications for United States security concerns, according to this "crumbling Empire" theory, are that the Soviet leadership is embarking on "reforms," which include the transfer of managers and resources from the military to the civilian sector of the Soviet economy, thus diminishing the potential Soviet threat to U.S. security.

EIR had occassion, in early 1983, to doubt Mr. Gates' professional credentials as the "CIA's best" Soviet expert, at a time when *EIR* first circulated its analysis that all Soviet policy making is determined by the Russian-chauvinist "Third and Final Rome" tendency, associated with the military elite and the Andropov-Gorbachov power combination. The response, in 1983, to our "Third Rome" analysis, from Mr. Gates' general direction was: "There is no such 'Third Rome' tendency; and, what is this 'Third Rome,' anyway?"

Ignorance of that school of Russian statecraft associated with the "Third Rome" would be enough to disqualify anyone from professional intelligence duties. Apparently, the ignorance of the CIA's Soviet experts under Mr. Gates, was somehow, protected. As the debate between the two contending analyses, "Third Rome," versus "crumbling Empire," grew, it became obvious that the ignoramuses at the various "analysis" desks of the CIA, were enjoying more than protection: the protectors of the "crumbling Empire" folly were engaged in a deception.

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The matter of Leo Cherne

The crisis of U.S. Intelligence evaluations respecting the Soviet Union goes back to the mid-1970s, associated with the strong reactions of the U.S. military leadership to Kissinger's arms control sellout in SALT, and the establishment of Soviet strategic supremacy. After the forced resignation of President Nixon, which prevented him from investigating Admiral Zumwalt's charges of double-cross at the SALT negotiations, the concern of numerous patriotic leaders over Soviet intentions and capabilities continued to grow. During George Bush's tenure as director of the CIA, Prof. Leo Cherne, a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Group since 1973, devised an ingenious way of defusing this ferment: He proposed the commissioning of two competing, rival intelligence reports on the Soviet Union, a game which was dubbed "Team 'A' versus Team 'B.'"

The arrangement was that the official 1976 *National Intelligence Estimate on the Soviet Union*, would be produced by two rival teams: one, "Team A," was headed by Howard Stoertz, the CIA's national intelligence officer on the U.S.-Soviet strategic balance, and others selected by the CIA. Robert M. Gates worked under Stoertz in various capacities. The other, "Team B," was headed by Richard Pipes, and included Daniel Graham, Paul Nitze, William Van Cleave, Gen. John W. Vogt, Paul Wolfowitz, Seymour Weiss, and others.

"Team B," rivaling official CIA estimates, presented at the time a much more alarming view of Soviet capabilities and intention, and many of the team members went on to found the Committee on the Present Danger, which later attained senior positions of influence in the Reagan administration. Eventually, out of the heirs of the "Team B" analysis, came the theory of the "crumbling Empire," in which Leo Cherne, now presiding over the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, plays a significant role.

Leo Cherne, a lifelong political friend of CIA Director Casey (in fact, Casey's first employer after the war), is the elderly statesman of a semi-formal group of very influential Social Democrats, which includes Paul Nitze, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Irving Kristol, Roy Godson, Max Kampelman, and others, all of whom played critical roles in the Reagan administration and its periphery. Cherne's influence over U.S. intelligence is much greater than merely his official position at the PFIAB would suggest—he is a very special "backchannel" between East and West, best approximating the old "Trust" arrangement of the 1920s and 1930s. Moreover, he and his friends exert an absolutely overwhelming influence over what is called the "arms control process."

Why Prof. Richard Pipes should part ways with such distinguished friends and be dumped from the National Security Council back in 1982 is an important question. It bears on the reasons why such consummate bureaucratic fools as Robert M. Gates become deputy directors of the CIA. Since Professor Pipes has, after numerous direct questions from the undersigned, refused to divulge the reasons for his break with the NSC, and his replacement by the young Lenczowski, we can only offer our educated guess as to why he parted ways with his old company.

Sometime after the "Team A-Team B" exercise, the growing influence of Russian-chauvinist ideological themes in the Soviet leadership had become a matter of concern among intelligence analysts. By reason of his background as an historian, Pipes was better qualified than most to pinpoint the threat to the United States represented by such ideological bent in Moscow. Others, however, among them Leo Cherne, chose to welcome the public surfacing of Third Rome Russian chauvinist themes in Russian society, as, presumably, a rival to the hated "Communist" ideological establishment, and as a potential ally of the United States. Since at least April of 1983, the Soviet desk of the National Security Council, on the record and in background discussions, has maintained that any Russian chauvinist revival, including the "Third Rome" variety, even if it came from Russian military circles, would be a welcome ally "against Communism."

This also has been the policy of William J. Casey, of the United States Information Agency, of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty Russian-language broadcasts which began under Casey appointee James Buckley and continue to this day, of the Russian-language programs of the Voice of America which are run by old Russian aristocratic families, and also the policy of various informal, para-governmental intelligence operations such as those run out of Sen. Jesse Helms's office by the notorious "Trust" operative Jon Speller.

The policy of the Kremlin has been to systematically encourage this pro-Third Rome bias in official U.S. intelligence circles. One of the Soviets' most favored ways of exerting this sort of influence is by means of so-called defectors being supplied to the CIA and others, who provide the appropriately tailored "debriefings." Leo Cherne and his notorious International Rescue Committee have, over the years, monopolized the "defectors' market," both genuine and fake. One of Cherne's more self-important sidekicks, Roy Godson of CSIS, has carved out a career interpreting defectors' debriefings for the Washington intelligence community. Cherne and his people have imposed the single most damaging criterion for establishing the bona fides of defectors: Those who profess intense Russian nationalism and anti-communism are accepted as authentic defectors, and are thus afforded every opportunity to pass on exactly the kind of information the Kremlin wishes Washington to believe.

It is the kind of data Robert Gates feasts on each time he testifies before Congress to argue either that the "Soviet SDI poses no threat," or that "the Russians had no involvement in the assassination plot against the Pope," or any other of the extravagant claims before Congress for which he has become famous.

If the United States never learns what happened at the last Soviet Party Congress, it will be because old fools like Cherne and Casey promote young fools like Gates, to feed on each other's political delusions. Meanwhile, Moscow laughs.

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